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ABSTRACT

The present discussion attempts to relate current changes in kindergarten education in China to contemporary political, social, and intellectual reforms. Kindergarten education in China has always reflected the country's social policy as well as its view of the nature of childhood. Currently, in China, more kindergartens exist under more varied sponsorship than previously was the case. Decentralization of decision making regarding kindergartens is presently more extensive than it was in the past. Today, Chinese kindergartens are responding to the need to educate children from one-child families and to provide day care for children of working mothers. The Chinese wish to replace formal direct teaching of kindergarten lessons with a teaching method emphasizing creativity and individuality through varied activities. The concern for different methods is a response to a need for a different kind of Chinese citizen in a reformed Chinese society. At the present time, the West is again seen as a major source of kindergarten reform. The works of Piaget and Freud are being increasingly studied, and American early childhood education is seen as a source of educational inspiration. While reform is uneven, limited by a lack of resources, and hampered by a shortage of trained teachers, it is nevertheless real. The extent to which it will ultimately change Chinese kindergartens is yet to be determined. (RH)

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CHINESE KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION AND ITS REFORM

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CHINESE KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION AND ITS REFORM

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During the last decade, the People's Republic of China has undergone significant policy reforms. Most of the reforms that have been observed and studied have been economic, but parallel reforms have taken place within the educational system. While much of the studies of education in China focus on secondary and higher education, significant reforms have also taken place at the kindergarten and primary levels. Because kindergartens represent the foundation of any educational system, and because they are so closely entwined with families, reforms at this level may have the greatest ultimate significance for China.

This paper has used as its data base a wide range of scholarly and popular writings on early childhood education as its data base, some written in English as well as others written in Chinese. These have included journal articles and reports of various agencies. It has also used direct observations of kindergartens in the cities of Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Yangzhou, Guilin, and in some of the rural areas surrounding those cities. In some cases, we were one of many foreign visitors to have visited a kindergarten; in others, we were the first foreign visitors to a community. We

also had the opportunity to interview early childhood educators from many normal universities, normal schools, education departments, and other government agencies.

Conclusions are difficult to reach in regards to trends in early childhood education in China for a variety of reasons. The data sources available are limited. There is also a tendency on the part of many officials to 'put their best foot forward', although this seems to be changing. Possibly most serious is the lack of information about early childhood education in general and research activities in particular, and the unevenness of development in the country. In addition, the statistics gathered and the research reported are limited in scope and sophistication so that care must be taken in using what is reported. More will be said about both these issues later.

Historical Developments in Chinese kindergartens

While China had a tradition of education that goes back thousands of years, the earlier tradition does not include a concern for the education of young children or for the development of universal education or literacy. Education in Imperial China was focussed on preparing individuals for the examinations needed to become government officials.

The first concern for early childhood education can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century. In the last days of the Q'ing dynasty, there was a concern for the lack

of modern elements in Chinese society and for the need for reform in many spheres of Chinese life to allow China to compete with and defend itself from western imperialist countries. In the field of education, the reformers mainly looked to Japan for sources of inspiration. This can be explained by the proximity of Japan to the China as well as the success of Japan, an Asian country that was seen as being similar to China in culture and politics, in adapting many elements of western society and becoming a strong nation as a result. Students were sent to study in Japan and many elements of modern Japanese society were taken as models for the reform of Chinese imperialist society (Cleverley,, 1985).

In 1903, a group of twenty kindergarten Japanese teachers were brought to China to establish kindergartens for children below age 6 and prepare Chinese kindergarten teachers. An additional group of Japanese kindergarten teachers arrived in 1920. At about that time Wu Zu-zhe, a Chinese educator, also went to Japan to study kindergarten education. Upon his return, he offered courses in child psychology and early childhood education. Missionaries going to Japan from the United States, even before the twentieth century, had established Froebelian kindergartens there, training Japanese kindergarten teachers, and translating Froebel's works on the kindergarten into Japanese. The fact that child psychology was also taught suggests that the kindergartens had moved to some degree from their original

Froebelian roots.

During this same period western missionaries, most of whom came from America, also established Froebelian kindergartens in China. Although there had been programs for young children established earlier, these have not been characterized as kindergartens but rather as "observing things around them schools. These programs were part of institutes for widows who lacked financial support and were called " Mong Yiang Yuan." The widows were hired to teach the children, much as in the Dames schools of the American colonial period. While there seem to be no existing records of these schools available, the name suggest that they were at least influenced by the work of Pestalozzi.

After the Imperial reign in China, and especially after World War I, the Chinese moved away from the influence of Japan in educational and cultural affairs and looked more toward America and Europe. This was partly as result of the unpopularity of Japanese political activities in Asia and partly the result of the discontent with the Versailles Treaty which gave Japan extraterritorial rights in China. The shift was also the result of the availability of American money to support Chinese educational efforts. Both missionary and secular American schools were established in China, and funds were provided to send Chinese to American universities. The most popular of these for Chinese students was Columbia University, where a number of Chinese students were influenced by John Dewey and the American

Progressive education movement.

Dewey's influence became even greater when he lectured extensively in China over a period of two years, 1919-21. These lectures took place in Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai as well as in smaller cities. He was heavily supported during his stay by the normal schools in Beijing and Nanjing. While Dewey's progressive philosophy did not have the wide ranging influence over the developing republic that some of his students had wished for, it did have a major influence upon educators and helped to shape the evolving thought about what education, and especially teacher education should be. His lectures throughout China were carefully noted by his students, translated into Chinese and published in book form. In addition, a number of short-lived progressive education journals were founded during this period (Keenan, 1977).

Dewey's thought might have also laid the groundwork for the establishment of progressive kindergartens in the 1920's. These kindergartens evolved parallel to American progressive kindergartens and were influenced by them. They used child development theory and knowledge in creating curriculum much like their American counterparts and saw the social life of the child as the subject of education in kindergarten. The best known of these progressive Chinese early educators is Chen He-qin.

Chen He-qin studied in the United States from 1914-1919. On his return to China, he became a professor of child

psychology in the Education Division of Nanjing Southeast University. He established his first kindergarten in his home in 1923 and in 1928 established five experimental schools and kindergartens in Nanjing. The Gulou kindergarten which he founded in Nanjing is again being1 given special recognition as the place where Chen He-qin developed his kindergarten experiments. His educational ideas continued to influence early childhood education in China through the 1940s.

Chen's educational experiments included the creation of a unit-based kindergarten curriculum, with learning activities centered around a theme that would be the focus of the program for several days or a week. He experimented with teaching reading within a language experience framework. While he taught reading, writing, science and social science in the kindergarten, he did this within a flexible framework and in the context of play activities. He paid special attention to music education, teaching singing to 3- and 4-year-olds. Chen also devised new kindergarten equipment and studied the most effective use of educational equipment with kindergarten children.

Chen's approach was to adapt the progressive education philosophy of the United States to the Chinese context. He focussed on learning activities within the context of children's lives and paid especial attention to their physical education, desiring to do away with the image of the weak Chinese that was prevalent at the time. He also gave especial attention to outdoor

education.

In addition to his concern for kindergarten education, Chen was involved in the reform of kindergarten teacher education. While there had previously been kindergarten training classes in a few normal schools, Chen He-qin established the first kindergarten normal school in 1940, the Jiangsi Early Childhood Education Normal School. Here he practiced teacher training with in the context of "education through life." Buildings were designed and constructed while the program was being established. Chen He-qin designed the buildings and he, the staff and the students all participated in the construction of building, roads and streets. While the normal school originally catered to local students, in time students came from 12 other provinces, in addition to Jiangsi province.

A standard teacher training curriculum had been established by the Ministry of Education in 1935. Chen, however, developed his own program of kindergarten teacher training. This consisted of three subjects: spiritual education, general education, and professional education. Each subject was taught so that its relevance to kindergarten education would be evident. While textbooks were used, they were used flexibly, and teaching was not restricted to texts. The slogan of the school, "teaching by doing, learning by doing, progressing by doing," reflected the same progressive philosophy that was the foundation of his kindergarten education. Education was to take place as a result

of living and the formal education of potential kindergarten teachers was integrated with their practical life experiences. In 1945 the Jiangsi Early Childhood Education Normal School was merged with the Nanchang Women's Normal School and was moved to Shanghai (Zhong, 1979, 1981).

Chen He-qin was not the only leader in early childhood education in the pre-1949 era in China, though might have been the most influential in his time and again today. Zhang Xue-men was also a famous kindergarten educator in Beijing. Zhang was principal of the Beiping (Beijing) Preschool Education Normal School which was founded in 1930. Though also based upon a Progressive Education philosophy, this normal school does not seem as extreme in its approach to teacher education as was Chen's.

The curriculum of the Beiping Preschool Normal School included Chinese Language, The Three People's Principles (Nationalism, Democracy, and People's Livelihood) put forward by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, philosophy, early childhood education, kindergarten administration, children's literature, child psychology, play, children's hygiene, practice, music, fine arts, and physical education. The school stressed the relation of theory to practice, the importance of teaching skills and independent thinking on the part of kindergarten teachers and the importance of teachers becoming involved in the social life of the community. There seemed to be less stress placed in this

school on "learning by living" than was stressed in Chen's school in the south (Jing, 1983).

Kindergartens operated as private institutions during this period or were attached to Christian missionaries, much as were other educational institutions. They were essentially middle class, urban institutions reflecting the Western influence in China.

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, all of education in China underwent major change. Rather than continue to look to the West for appropriate models of education, the models by which educational institutions were transformed came from the USSR. Multipurpose universities were reorganized into single-purpose universities similar to those in the Soviet Union and progressive kindergarten practices based upon American theories of early childhood education were replaced by kindergartens reflecting the Soviet model.

While there has been little change in kindergarten philosophy since the 1950s in China, there have been significant developments. Most important has been the expansion of kindergarten education throughout China, with kindergartens being provided in rural as well as urban areas and in factories and other work units. The promise was to make kindergartens available to all young children rather than only accessible to the children of an affluent and westernized minority. Equally important was the expansion of kindergarten teacher training after

"Liberation." There was a reform in normal school education during that period and an expansion of normal school facilities for the preparation of kindergarten teachers.

While kindergartens remained open during the Cultural Revolution, unfortunately the training of kindergarten teachers all but stopped. Of the 19 kindergarten normal schools operating in 1965, only one remained open during the cultural revolution and that continued in name only. This trend has been reversed and by 1979 there were 28 kindergarten normal schools enrolling 9,000 students (Chinese Education, 1982).

Current Status of Chinese Kindergartens

Kindergarten education may be seen as the first level of formal education in China. It serves 3- to 5- or 6-year-old children. Attendance is not compulsory, as in primary education, nor is kindergarten universally available. In addition, kindergartens are not always offered by education authorities, but may be sponsored by a number of other agencies as well. In addition to local education authorities, kindergartens may be sponsored by the Women's Federation, the county unit (formally the commune), or the work unit (which could be an office, factory or farm). Recently, a number of private kindergartens have also been allowed. Some of these are be run by retired teachers, others by Overseas Chinese, (persons of Chinese birth or descent, who are residents of other countries). While serving a number of

purposes, the kindergarten is conceived of as an educational institution. The State Education Commission (SEC), formerly the Ministry of Education, is responsible for educational policy in China, including policy about kindergartens. It establishes rules, regulations and standards, and also suggests curriculum activities. A trial edition of the kindergarten curriculum, for example, was developed by the SEC and has been widely disseminated and followed. It is considered educational policy in the nation and is available for every kindergarten. The provinces and municipalities, however, are responsible for the provision of kindergarten education. Supervision of kindergartens is provided by both the Commission and provincial and local education authorities(Wei, 1986).

The standards established by the SEC are considered general guidelines and there are no mechanisms for insuring implementation. Actual standards in kindergartens vary widely with lower standards existing in rural schools than in large cities and municipalities like Beijing and Shanghai. Standards are also higher in provinces along the coast than inland. Essentially, the standards of kindergarten, as of all education, are established locally and are closely linked to local economic conditions. As a result of the unevenness of economic development, these standards are becoming more disparate.

Kindergartens are not free in China; parents are expected to pay a fee, which might range from 7 to 20 yuan per month. Often

these fees cover the cost of food and the salary for the teacher aide, rather than a general tuition fee, at most this fee will cover only a third of the cost of kindergarten education. Fees at boarding kindergartens are higher, over 30 yuan per month, while fees in rural kindergartens are considerably lower. Some kindergartens will operate sessions during vacation times, assessing the parents an extra fee for this. Often the parent's work unit will cover part of the fee (At the time this information was collected there were approximately 3 yuan to the American dollar).

While there are nurseries in China that serve children below the age of three, these are not conceived of as educational institutions. Their practitioners are not considered teachers but are considered nurses. The nurseries are not under the supervision of local educational authorities. Thus, while some Chinese children attend nurseries, which might even be administered together with a kindergarten, it is attendance in kindergarten that is seen as the beginning of the child's education in China. Table I describes the structure of educational institutions in China.

There were 172,262 kindergartens in China in 1985, some of them had only one mixed-age class. More usual is the kindergarten with three or more classes, one for 3- to 4-year-olds, one for 4- to 5-year-olds and one for 5- to 6-year olds. Of the 486,999kindergarten classes recorded, 196,616 were attached

to primary schools. These kindergarten classes are structurally more like American kindergartens with children enrolled the year before they enter the primary school. There are also boarding kindergartens available in China which children attend from Monday morning through Saturday afternoon. These serve almost one and one half million children. These kindergartens are staffed by over 778,000 persons, including teachers, directors and medical personnel (see Table 2).

In most Chinese kindergartens children are grouped homogeneously by age. There are generally 20-25 3- to 4-old children in a class, 25-30 4- to 5-year-old children and 30-35 5- to 6-year-old children. In urban kindergartens each class is staffed by two teachers and an aide. Each teachers works with the children for a half-day and spends the other half-day preparing for teaching and making teaching aids. These teachers may alternate weekly, one teaching mornings one week and afternoons the next. The teacher aide works with the children throughout the day, not needing similar preparation time. There may be only one teacher per class with no aide in rural kindergartens where classes may be smaller .

Primary education begins at age 6 in some areas of China, while in other areas it does not begin until age 7. Thus the ages of children in kindergarten vary by location. In addition, many rural kindergartens will not have enough children in attendance to have more than one group. In these kindergartens mixed-age

classes will prevail.

No distinction is made in China between kindergartens and child care centers. Except for those attached to primary schools, kindergartens operate on a full-day basis and thus serve both as educational and child caring institutions. The primary school kindergartens, while in session all day, will only be in session for the full school day, the same as the primary classes. In addition, provision may not be made for serving lunch or providing for naps in the afternoon. The children will be sent home at the end of the morning session and will return again for the afternoon session. These children may be cared for by their grandparents during this period or they may join one of their parents in their work unit for the noon meal. The kindergartens that are attached to primary schools are viewed in some provinces as the model of the future.

The children arrive at kindergarten early in the morning, often by 7:30 a.m., brought by one of their parents. They are given a health check before entering the classroom. After the examination, they may engage in tasks related to caring for the kindergarten: feeding pets, dusting the room, or watering plants. This period is usually followed by morning exercises. The children do simple calisthenics, or play games devised by the teachers to exercise different parts of their bodies. They may also march or run outdoors.

Morning exercises are followed by lessons in the various

subjects of the kindergarten curriculum. The youngest children may have one or two lessons a day, ranging from 15 to 20 minutes a lesson while the oldest group may have 2 to 3 lessons a day for as long as 30 to 35 minutes each. These lessons cover the areas of Chinese language, mathematics, music, art, physical training and general knowledge (roughly equivalent to our science and social studies).

These content areas and the time the kindergarten is expected to devote to them is specified in the SEC's Trial Kindergarten Curriculum. While all kindergartens are expected to follow this plan, it is suggestive rather than required. Most kindergarten educators we spoke with said that they followed the Plan, but they have made some modifications in it.

There is usually a period of free play before the children between the lessons and they may also be given a morning snack at that time. This often consists of soy milk, a nutritional vegetable drink that is high in protein (Chinese diets generally do not include dairy products and in most areas milk is provided only for very young children, older persons, sick persons, and foreign visitors). The rest of the morning may be taken up with free play, music and dance, or teacher directed arts and crafts activities.

The children will have hot lunch before noon. After lunch the children will lie down for naps. Wooden beds with brightly covered mats and quilts will be set out in the room and all the

children will sleep. The beds are provided by the kindergarten, but the mats and quilts are provided by the children's families. After nap the children will be given a snack, often something sweet, and will spend the rest of the afternoon in free play, teacher-directed activities, practicing musical performances, or other activities until they are picked up to return home at the end of the day.

Many of the kindergarten activities are teacher-directed. The majority of kindergartens suffer from a lack of educational equipment for the children. There will be wooden tables and chairs for each child in the kindergarten. Some kindergartens will have little else in the way of equipment and most of the activities are either games that are played outdoors or table activities requiring paper g, pasting, drawing and coloring. In many kindergartens a limited amount and variety of toys and educational material will be found. The toys might include miniature cooking implements, dolls, balls, and construction materials. Either blocks or plastic table toys are used for construction. There are few wheel toys for children in the kindergartens, though there will be great variation in what is provided to children from kindergarten to kindergarten. Those kindergartens that are sponsored by wealthier production units will have much more in the way of equipment than others. While most kindergartens will have music provided by a pump organ or accordion, more affluent kindergartens will have pianos, and

cassette tape recorders. There may even be electronic keyboard instruments and computers for children to use.

Visits to Chinese Kindergartens

In order to get a sense of kindergarten education in China it is necessary to visit the kindergartens themselves. The descriptions of kindergartens that are available are limited, and many of them reflect another era. In addition, the descriptions given by Chinese sources are limited by the language we use. While we share many common words in our early childhood vocabularies, their meanings are not always held in common. Thus, the descriptions may not accurately portray the centers in our own terms.

Even a personal visit to a Chinese kindergarten may not provide a real picture of the situation. The kindergartens visited are always selected by the Chinese hosts and, just as we would always wish to present ourselves in the best possible light, so do the Chinese. Thus, one gets a picture, not of what is, but of what is considered desirable. In addition, the visit of a foreigner is a special event. Rather than unobtrusively sliding into the background and observing normal daily procedures, the visitor is often accompanied by others, and the visit is considered an important event in the school life.

The typical visit begins with an orientation. The visitor is

ushered into a lounge or conference room and is provided with tea, and possibly a wet towel if the weather is warm. After ceremonial welcomes and introductions, the director or assistant director provides an orientation. If the kindergarten is sponsored by a work unit, this may be provided by the leader of the work unit. The introduction will describe the history and philosophy of the kindergarten, the program, and some of the more attractive attributes of the center. Opportunity is always provided for questions, both during the orientation and after the visit to classes and questions always seem to be answered with candor. Because of the absence of knowledge of the Chinese language, an interpreter was always present at our visits, usually provided by the Normal University that served as host in a particular city, but sometimes by the kindergarten as well.

After the orientation comes a tour of the facility. We were able to observe all classrooms freely. Often we were also shown the kitchen and health facilities, especially if these were the pride of the kindergarten. We observed a variety of activities. During visits in past years, we were always given a performance by the kindergarten children: singing, dancing, or drama. We were invited to fewer performances during these visits than in visits done earlier. Each kindergarten we visited was different and each had its own particular story to tell.

Boarding kindergarten in Beijing

This is a large kindergarten consisting of many buildings

and large play area with a few attractive pieces of permanent play apparatus. Children arrive at the kindergarten on Monday morning and leave on Saturday afternoon spending the weekend with their parents. Such boarding kindergartens are available for parents whose work schedule does not allow them to care for their young children or who may be attending school as well as working. The rooms are clean and airy. The children seem well cared for.

We are taken to two classrooms to observe instrumental music lessons. In one of these, children about 4 to 5 years of age are learning to play the violin; in the other room children are learning to play the accordion. Group lessons are provided. Individual children are called upon to perform as is the entire class. The level of competence seems quite high considering the children's age. We are told that the children have only recently been given these lessons. The music teachers come from outside the teaching staff. The children's families are expected to provide the instruments and all of the children in a single class learn the same instrument.

After this observation we are taken to a large room where children are playing with a wide variety of toys. Some are cooking with miniature pots and pans, making dumplings from real dough. Other children are building with construction materials. There are a variety of other toys available for the children, all in good repair and all seem to be well used by the children who have the option of staying in a single play area or moving from

activity to activity within the class. After this we observe some of the other rooms in the school as well as the outdoor play area where children are playing. Ropes and balls are available to children in addition to the climbing, swinging, sliding, and rocking apparatus in the play area.

This seems to be an affluent kindergarten, with a considerable play equipment and musical instruction available that is not normally included in Chinese kindergarten programs. The director seems justifiably proud of the school's excellent reputation. It is seen as a desirable kindergarten by many parents.

Visit to a Rural Kindergarten

This kindergarten is located in a township outside of Beijing. When we arrive we are given an orientation by the township leader. The farms here are considered a model we are told, and are highly productive. We drive a short way from the county building to the kindergarten, a single two-story building overlooking a play yard. The rooms open up onto a narrow veranda which serves as a corridor. Well-padded children are in all the classrooms; there is no central heating here. Each classroom is furnished with wooden tables and stools. Wooden beds and pads are also available for naps. There no toys or educational equipment in evidence outside of a blackboard and a few pictures on the wall in each classroom. We observe lessons in a couple of classes. The music lesson has the children singing in unison to

the accompaniment of a pump organ. We also observe a language lesson. The only teaching aid is a set of charts hanging on the wall. As the teacher points to the picture, the children describe it in unison. Sometimes a single child is called to pint to a part of the chart. These charts came from an educational publisher in Shanghai.

The rooms in this kindergarten are bare, lacking in educational supplies and equipment. The teachers themselves have very little training. Thus, while the children are physically well cared for, there is little in the way of meaningful programming for them.

Kindergarten in Nanjing

When we arrived at the kindergarten in the morning the children were outdoors playing games with the teacher, some with balls, others with hoops. The buildings were old, but clean. In the background was the rising skeleton of a multi-storied building that was soon to replace the older single-storied kindergarten. The window sills of the classrooms were lined with containers of plants. The walls were covered with children's art work as well as pictures drawn by the teacher. The classrooms were well-equipped. There are many different toys on shelves around the classroom, including a full set of wooden building blocks. We were also shown a personal computer which was available for the children in the class.

We were invited to observe a teaching demonstration to be

conducted by one of the teachers, a "model" teacher for the province. The teacher stands at the front of a large room next to a tall easel which contains her teaching aids. The children are seated on tables in front of her. Behind the children is a class of students from a local kindergarten normal school. We sit in the back near the students. The teacher presents a number concept, comparing it with those above at and below it. Each number is illustrated by drawings which are revealed at the appropriate time. The children are asked questions during the lessons. One child is called on to give the answer which is immediately given and accepted. After the teacher's exposition, simple materials are distributed to the children at their tables who engaged in counting activities.

The teacher's exposition had a quality of performance to it. While we could not understand the words used, the flavor of the lesson is like that of a Chinese stage or television performance. After the lesson, the teacher remains with the normal school students for a discussion of the lesson.

Other lessons and activities were observed later in the morning. We were also brought into the room where we had our orientation. A group of children were invited to join us and were provided with an electronic keyboard instrument. The children in turn demonstrated their ability to play a variety of songs on it. They varied the rhythmic accompaniment by moving a switch then played simple songs with these different accompaniments.

Rural Kindergarten outside Yangzhou

It had rained the night before our visit and we were warned by our driver that we might not be able to get to the kindergarten if the roads are too muddy. Fortunately this was not the case. We arrived in a rural area and turned off what was the main local road into a school yard. There was a long building on one side of the yard that contained the local primary school. On the other side was a single small building containing this one-room rural kindergarten. Local officials were waiting in the yard to greet us. After the greeting the children came out and engaged in music and dance activities for our benefit. They were accompanied by their teacher on a pump organ. As we looked along the roads surrounding the school we saw groups of adults gathering along the road watching the activities. We could not tell whether we or the children were the focus of attention. After the performance the children reentered their kindergarten and we followed. The room was a dark, simple one, with a dirt floor. The furnishings consisted of wooden tables and stools. The children were engaged in play with plastic table toys. We could see one of the teachers still unwrapping sets of toys.

After this visit we were taken to a larger township kindergarten, a two story building within an enclosed courtyard. This was recently constructed and was the pride of the community. It was well built, as Chinese kindergartens go, light and airy. Because of the timing of our visit we saw little in the way of

kindergarten activities, though there were displays of some of the teacher's crafts work that we ere shown. Interestingly, the kindergarten was built next door to a senior citizen's home, which we also visited. This was a deliberate plan to encourage intergenerational interactions.

Factory Kindergarten in Shanghai

When we arrived at the factory gates we were greeted by the director of the kindergarten and the assistant manager of the factory. We were told about the factory and the tires it produces as well as about the role the kindergarten plays for the workers. The kindergarten hours, for example, are modified according to the working hours of the children's parents. It is also open an extra day since most of the workers are on duty on the weekend.

After the briefing, we went to the multi-storied building in which the kindergarten was housed. Walking up the wooden steps we could see two kindergarten classes on each floor. The activities observed were similar to those in other kindergartens. We were able to observe a language and music lesson. One of the teachers had previously retired from a kindergarten run by the local education authority. Most of the other teachers were factory workers who were selected as kindergarten teachers because of their love of children. They were given short courses (up to 6 months) before beginning as a kindergarten teacher.

The rooms themselves were bright and airy. The outdoor play space was smaller than in most kindergartens we had visited. The

classes were not equipped with a great deal of toys and equipment, but each had a cabinet with a collection of very attractive toys. We were told that these were given to the kindergarten by the workers in the factory, as part of the tradition of gift-giving on Children's Day. Upon leaving we passed workmen delivering meat, fish, fruit and vegetables for the kindergarten kitchen. We were impressed with the quality of the food that was prepared for these children.

Kindergarten in Guangzhou

We were invited to visit what was considered to be one of the best kindergartens in the city. It was located on an attractive, tree-lined street with many older Western-style buildings. The kindergarten had a lovely garden area as well as a play yard for the children. The rooms in a set of buildings on the grounds were light, airy, attractive and well maintained. There were children's pictures and paper cut-outs attractively displayed on the wall. Most of the children were outdoors when we arrived. Some areas were set up for dramatic play including a play coffee shop and a play barber/beauty shop. A group of children were playing games in another part of the play area.

As we observed the children at play, a bus pulled up and a group of European tourists entered the kindergarten. They milled around, observing the activities. A number of kindergarten children approached the visitors, took them by the hand and invited them into their play, serving them "coffee" and giving

them "haircuts and shampoos." At a signal the visitors assembled at their bus and departed. We continues to observe the children's play, then were escorted into a room to be served tea and have a meeting with the director. We talked about the history of the kindergarten, its educational philosophy, and the activities offered to the children.

As we finished our meeting, another bus load of European visitors arrived at the kindergarten. The children started playing their games again, the musical activities resumed and a number children approached the visitors, took them by the hand and invited them into their play areas to have some "coffee" or have their hair "cut" or "shampooed."

Analyzing Chinese Kindergartens

Many more kindergartens were visited than could be described here. Each was different in its setting and atmosphere. They were alike, however, in the kind of programs provided to children. Some offered a richer range of activities than the kindergartens described here. Many offered less in the way of programs for children. In all of the kindergartens, the children seemed healthy, alert and responsive. We always felt that the children were treated with a great deal of love. We did not see punitive teachers. When children were misbehaving, which was seldom, they seemed to be coaxed into conforming. In only one kindergarten class did we see children seriously misbehaving with

the teacher seemingly out of control. This kindergarten teacher was being encouraged to offer an "American style of kindergarten education" by a music educator who had been to the United States and was conducting an experimental musical program with some of the classes.

This is not to suggest that there are no problems in Chinese kindergarten education. Those that do exist will be discussed below within the topics of (1) provision of kindergarten education, (2) problem of the only child, (3) teacher training, and (4) reform of the kindergarten curriculum.

Provision of kindergarten education

Because the Chinese population is so vast and the resources available in China have been so inadequate over time, every problem affecting the population is a major one. Providing kindergartens for all children is certainly one of the vast problems. Because women in China are expected to work full time, there is a need for child care, which is met through the kindergartens. There are not enough kindergartens to meet all the demands. In rural areas providing kindergartens is made more difficult because of the problem of transportation. The absence of an adequate infrastructure makes all transportation of goods and people difficult. Kindergartens need to be within walking, or biking distance of the families they serve, requiring large numbers of small units. But even in the large cities, where transportation is less of a problem, and educational standards

and expectations are higher, there are not enough kindergarten spaces for all the children requesting entry. Even with family planning the child populations continues to grow in China. In Shanghai, for example,there were 75,000 more 4-6 year old children in 1986 than in 1985 and there was no additional kindergarten spaces to accommodate them. As a way of dealing with the problem, work unit kindergartens were asked to open enrollment to the public and kindergartens were asked to over-enroll each class by 10% (China Daily, 5/1/85). Similar shortages were reported in Beijing (China Daily, 3/8/86). While education funds are expected to rise by 72% by 1990 (China Daily, 4/8/86), it is not clear how kindergartens will be effected by this.

Because the problems are so great, The SEC has taken a particular approach to their solution. They divide China into three parts, that with the highest level of development, that this the middle level of development and that with the lowest level of development. The plan is to focus first on those areas which have the highest level. It is felt that the greates impact can me made there in terms of finding solutions (Wei, 1986). While this may be a useful way to deal with educational problems in the long run, in the short run it will increase whatever inequities exist. This may make national progress in kindergarten education more difficult in the future, for the places where kindergartens lag are not finding greater resources for development. In addition, problems continue to rise. By 1990 it

is expected that there will be 23 million children ages 35 who will require more than a million preschool teachers. Currently there are 500,000 preschool teachers.

Another solution that China has found for providing more kindergartens, is by allowing private kindergartens to develop. This would have been unacceptable a few years back. Whether two systems of kindergarten education, public and private, will continue to develop or how the systems will impact on one another is difficult to predict.

In addition to providing the number of kindergartens needed, these kindergartens must be adequately furnished. There was great variation in the resource available within kindergartens, from dirt or concrete floored classes with only tables and stools, to kindergartens equipped with the most modern electronic devices. In general, however, we found few physical resources in Chinese kindergartens. Some had only paper and pencils, others had a few toys.

In general, good educational toys seem to be hard to find in China. Few manufacturers today seem willing produce worthwhile educational materials. This is recognized as a problem and last March a conference on children's toys was held by the Child Development Center of China to which educators and toy manufacturers were invited. In addition, the State Education Commission and the Light Industry Commission, with support for a UNICEF grant, established the Beijing Teaching Aids Research and

Development Center. While the center initially focussed on teaching materials for elementary and secondary education, it has, over the last year, included work on materials for kindergarten education. The center creates prototypes and helps manufactures to begin making educational materials. It also tests materials sent to them by manufacturers. It is hoped that the center will have a positive impact on the availability of educational materials.

The Only Child

Not only are kindergartens expected to provide child care for children of working mothers in China, but they are also expected to resolve problems resulting from family policy. The new policy has been conceived of with the goal of "one family-one child," though a number of exceptions exist. As a result, China has become concerned about the social development of children being raised in families without peers. It is reported that about 90% of the kindergarten children are only children, at least in urban areas. All the love and concern of parents and grandparents in a family are focussed on a single child. The family is described as a 4:2:1 structure, with four grandparents, two parents and one child. As a result, teachers and administrators describe these children as spoiled children who only do what they want and who don't listen to their parents. These children are seen as having difficulty sharing with others, and being part of a group. It is felt that the kindergarten group can provide the

social education these children need. Here children learn to help one another, share with one another, even share birthdays as in a family. Older children are also taught to help younger children in these kindergartens. Since China as a culture has always b=valued membership in a family and in a group, the problem of the only child will continue to persist and remain a significant one.

The kindergarten is not the only solution proposed for the problem of the only child. The Women's Federation has established a number of "Parents Schools" where parents learn to deal with the problems of raising only children. About 30,000 such schools have already been established (China Daily, 5/26/86). Other solutions have also been suggested.

It is interesting that the descriptions of changes in Chinese children that are purported to arise from the one child family policy are similar to descriptions of Changing children in America (Zimiles, 1985) as well as descriptions that Japanese kindergarten teachers provide of their children (personal communication). It would be interesting to explore whether the problems are more universal than Chinese educators suggest and is a consequence of factors beyond family policy. Interestingly, without a similar family policy in the United States, we have arrived at the situation where a vast number of our young children are only children.

Teacher training

The availability of kindergartens has expanded tremendously since 1949, but the preparation of kindergarten teachers has not. While there was a major expansion of programs to prepare kindergarten teachers in the 1950s and early 1960s, the closing of teacher preparation institutions during the Cultural Revolution created a problem that has not yet been resolved.

Kindergarten teachers are generally trained at the normal school level. These institutions parallel the upper middle school, equivalent to our senior high school (see Table 2). They offer three year programs of education which combine the general education of the middle school with teacher training. While there are four-year kindergarten normal school programs, their number has diminished as the need for trained kindergarten teachers has increased. There are also normal colleges which may provide a combination of three year and five year programs of teacher preparation for kindergarten (two years of college in addition to the three years of normal school). At Shanghai Kindergarten Normal College, for example all students enter after completing lower middle school. At the end of two years, the group is divided based upon examination and class grades, with one class continuing in the normal school program and graduating at the end of the third year and the other class going on to the college program and graduating at the end of their fifth year.

Kindergarten teacher training is also offered in some regular normal schools, which primarily train primary school

teachers. There are also regular senior middle schools that offer kindergarten training classes as vocational education. In addition to these more complete forms of training, a variety of short courses offered for beginning teachers in-service training centers. Some courses last a few weeks, others as long as a year. These centers are sponsored by the local education authority. Unfortunately, less than 12% of the kindergarten teachers currently practicing have even short term training.

There are a number of ways in which the shortage of kindergarten teachers is being addressed. One is through the expansion of teacher training in normal schools. The reduction in the number of 4-year normal school programs and the related increase in the number of three year programs is aimed at increasing the supply of trained kindergarten teachers by turning them out more quickly. In addition there are a number of short-term teacher training program available. Many provincial and local education authorities are expanding in-service education, providing short courses ranging from one month to one year to train kindergarten teachers. Normal university students are admonished to go to the countryside during their summer vacations to provide courses for teachers. Remote teacher training programs, using videotapes are being expanded and the kindergarten normal university programs, which provide teachers for the normal schools are expanding their programs as well. Many of these efforts are supported by UNICEF as well as by Chinese

educational authorities (Spodek, 1987).

It is doubtful, however, that the current expansion of kindergarten teacher training will be able to solve the shortage of trained kindergarten teacher. KIndergarten education is expected to continue to increase in the years ahead, with plans to double the number of kindergartens from 1986 to 1991. It would be difficult for the training efforts to keep up with the demand for new kindergarten teachers this expansion will require, let alone adequately train the unprepared or inadequately prepared teachers in existing programs. Here, as in other arenas, the sheer size of the Chinese population makes any problem a major one requiring the infusion of vast amounts of resource. In addition, there are structural elements in the teacher training system that create problems related to the quality of teacher training. Kindergarten teachers are trained in normal schools and lack the qualifications to be admitted to universities. Normal school teachers are trained in normal universities. Because of the selection process, it is hardly ever possible for students in these universities to have been teachers. The bulk of the teacher educators have had no practical experience outside of a possible four-week teaching practice at the end of their own training program. They lack the practical knowledge and insights that result from practice that might otherwise be incorporated into pre-service education of kindergarten teachers. Some kindergarten teachers are enrolled in two year non-degree

university programs. These teachers return to their kindergartens to become "backbone" teachers, "model" teachers, and teachers for in-service centers (Spodek, 1987).

Reforming the Kindergarten Curriculum

The current curriculum for Chinese kindergartens was issued in draft form in 1981. It is available in English as an appendix in Young children in China (Liljestrom, Noren-Bjorn, Schyl-Bjurman, Ohrn, Gustafsson, & Lofgren, 1982). This document contains three sections: (1) characteristics and educational task for children by age, (2) educational content and requirements, and (3) educational methods and cautions. The kindergarten curriculum addresses health and nutrition concerns as well as educational concerns. Education content is divided into habits of healthful living, physical activities, morals, language, general knowledge, arithmetic, music and fine arts. Instructional methods include play, physical activities, class lessons, observation, work and recreation

The Chinese kindergarten teacher's concept of curriculum still rests primarily on the provision of instruction through lessons. Play is seldom viewed as educational in the sense that many American kindergarten teachers view it. It is viewed as a recess. While a new draft of the kindergarten curriculum is being prepared at present by the State Education Commission, it is doubtful if the concept of curriculum expressed will be changed in any dramatic way from the current version.

There are, however, winds of change in the air in China. In discussions with early childhood educators I was continually told that the current kindergarten curriculum does not prepare the child for the future. Economic reform has led to other reforms in China. There is more concern now for individuality and creativity in youngsters. There is a concern that all education, including kindergarten education, should be designed to prepare children for the future. The fear was expressed that the current kindergarten curriculum was not doing this.

This concern was expressed in an article by Wei He, published in Educational Research (Wei, 1986). The belief is expressed that the current kindergarten program represents a closed system. In order to open the system it is suggested that teachers need to learn more about how children learn and develop and pay more attention to individual differences among children. As a result of reform, it is suggested that content, methods and materials may all have to be altered in Chinese kindergartens. It is also suggested that the administration of kindergarten education may need to be modified and that the qualifications for kindergarten teachers may need to be improved as well.

While some of the kindergarten reforms will be the result of internal changes within China, others will come as a result of increased contact with Western early childhood educational theories and practices. Currently one can find books by Freud and Piaget being read by university students in early childhood

education. This was not the case even four years ago and is an example of how the new generation of kindergarten educators are being introduced to theories that have been denied them in the past. Unfortunately, however, these theories are studied in the abstract, with little concern as to their meanings for kindergarten practice. But American textbooks in early childhood education are being made available in more and more normal university libraries at the same time as an increasing number of normal university students are gaining proficiency in the English language.

Another important influence is the development of a major UNICEF project in kindergarten teacher education. Eight normal universities scattered throughout China along with a number of normal schools with which they are working are being helped to upgrade their facilities and programs. A considerable number of kindergarten educators will be studying in colleges and universities in the United States and in other Western countries. They will be bringing their newfound knowledge to bear on the problems of Chinese kindergartens when they return. There is no doubt that this infusion of knowledge will have an impact on Chinese kindergartens in the future. But just now great that impact will be cannot be easily predicted. Those who visit other countries for short periods of time may lack the cognitive structures to understand the meanings of what they see, hear and read. Too often only superficial knowledge is gained from such

experiences and what will be introduced into Chinese kindergartens may be the "surface structure" rather than the "deep structure" of early childhood education in the United States and in other Western countries.

The other problem with this approach to change is that it is not easy to adopt practices from one culture into another without a significant amount of adaptation. Whether there will be a conscious, deliberate attempt to make the necessary adaptations is difficult to foresee.

Certainly, the increased contact between Chinese kindergarten educators and those in the West will influence the direction of change, as will other reforms in Chinese society. Economic reforms are evident in many places in China. With them have come other influences, many of which are being seen as destructive and some of these are being repressed at present. The important thing may be for Chinese kindergarten educators to maintain those elements in the Chinese kindergarten that are rooted in cultural traditions and which serve the children well, using knowledge of early childhood education abroad as a source of suggestions for additional modifications.

Changes will certainly come to kindergarten in China in the years ahead. But progress in reform will require additional resources, to fund new kindergarten, to provide more and better educational resources, to modify the curriculum and make it more responsive to the needs of the children as well as to the

evolving needs of the culture, to improve the qualifications of current teachers and to improve the preparation of incoming teachers, as well as to increase the number of teachers being trained. Certainly China values young children and their education enough to want this to happen. Only the future will tell how much reform and what direction reform will take in the Chinese kindergartens of the future.

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